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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: A/S KANSTEINER MEETING WITH  
BATAGARAWA

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR HOWARD F. JETER. REASON 1.5  
(B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary: During a July 24 meeting with Minister of State For Defense (Army) Lawal Batagarawa, A/S Kansteiner raised the inquiry into the 2001 Benue state massacre, the recent legislative hold on WASP funding, the Army's response to violence in Plateau State that has claimed a soldier and police officer, and prospects for violence in the upcoming elections. Batagarawa requested USG help to defuse potential trouble in Bakassi, assistance on debt relief and more police training. In attendance at the meeting were Ambassador Jeter, Kansteiner Senior Special Advisor Jim Dunlop, Political Counselor, Pol/Mil officer and DATT (notetaker). End summary.

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BENUE INQUIRY -- NEED FOR PROGRESS  
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12. (C) A/S Kansteiner met Minister of State for Defense (Army) Lawal Batagarawa at the Ambassador's residence on the evening of 24 July, after his arrival from Libreville. A/S Kansteiner informed Batagarawa of Senator Feingold's decision to place a legislative hold on the proposed \$2m program for post-Operation Focus Relief (OFR) sustainment for the five US-trained Nigerian peacekeeping battalions. The legislative action was prompted by the apparent lack of progress in the inquiry into the army massacre of civilians in Benue State last October. Kansteiner added that the Commission seemed dilatory and its proceedings appeared to be open-ended. He asked when the proceedings would close. The Ambassador raised concerns about the credibility of the Commission, noting he was troubled by the delay in the Commission actually going to the troubled areas to gather evidence from local sources and people who could not travel to Abuja. He also cited the Commission's lack of prosecutorial power as a concern.

13. (C) Batagarawa responded that the lack of funding delayed the initial start of the inquiry (Funding also affected the start of a separate military investigation on the events.) The shift of the Commission from Abuja to the locus of the violence was also impeded by lack of money. He agreed that the Commission needed to visit the affected areas to give the numbers of poor people who cannot to travel to Abuja a chance to be heard and provide evidence. Additionally, travel by the Commission would give its members an opportunity to see first hand the sites of violence. Constitutionally the Commission could not have prosecutorial powers Batagarawa noted, but its findings would be referred to the appropriate authorities, including the Justice Ministry. The facts gathered could be used as evidence at trial. Batagarawa stated that the internal army inquiry would take place but would never be made public; however, he offered to privately brief the Embassy and/or Senator Feingold on its findings. A/S Kansteiner noted that the in-house investigation and briefing of USG officials would be helpful. Batagarawa volunteered to travel to the U.S. in August to meet Senator Feingold to discuss the status of the investigation.

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NIGERIAN CONCERNS-BAKASSI IS NUMBER ONE  
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14. (S) Minister Batagarawa expressed deep concern about the Bakassi peninsula. The GON expected a decision by the ICJ any time after September and

thought it would go against Nigeria. He pointed out the difficult position the GON would be in politically, particularly in the run-up to elections. The GON needed a way out. "We don't want to go to war. It would be bad for us, undermining our credibility as a peacekeeper in the region." He agreed with Ambassador Jeter's assessment that it would also destabilize the region. The GON wanted to negotiate a political solution in advance of the decision, but Cameroon appeared disinterested. President Obasanjo had made three separate attempts to talk with Cameroon's Biya, but the latter rebuffed Obasanjo each time. The Minister added that the GON requested French President Chirac's assistance as an intermediary. Chirac was unhelpful, stating there was nothing he could do since he had little influence on Biya.

15. (S) A/S Kansteiner replied that dialogue with Cameroon was crucial, and needed to occur before the ICJ decision. Afterwards, he said, the winner of the judgment would not have any incentive to talk. The A/S offered U.S. assistance in conveying messages to the Cameroonians, but assessed our influence as much less than that of the French. The Ambassador noted that much of this problem was personality driven, as Biya purposefully isolated himself and was intractable and stubborn. (Note: This assertion was based on the French Ambassador's and the GOF's assessment of Biya.)

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OTHER POSSIBLE MILITARY VIOLENCE  
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16. (C) The Minister stated he had no information outside of press accounts about the reported killing of Sierra Leonean civilians by Nigerian peacekeepers in Freetown. Regarding the continuing violence in Plateau State and threats by military officers to avenge the killings of a soldier there, the Minister assured A/S Kansteiner that there would be no heavy-handed response. Both A/S Kansteiner and the Ambassador emphasized that an overzealous, unrestrained response by the military would essentially seal the fate of USG military cooperation with Nigeria. The Minister explained the situation had escalated beyond the police's ability to control, requiring the military to restore order. In fact, the Minister stated that the publicized military threat had been taken out of context by a journalist covering a meeting designed to help restore calm to the area. The journalist had been thrown out of the meeting and retaliated by writing a negative story. The Minister noted that curbing the growth of armed banditry in the area necessitated highly visible military maneuvers and expressed concern about how such movements would be exploited by an often irresponsible media.

17. (C) Comment: Security forces report groups of violent bandits roving in Plateau and neighboring states all the way to the Chadian border. There was a recent firefight between army units and criminals in northern Plateau State during which several bandits were allegedly killed. However, the recent spike in violence in Plateau cannot all be attributed to criminality. Most of the recent violence has been communal or election-related. End Comment.

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ELECTIONS "ARE HEATING UP"  
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18. (C) Responding to A/S Kansteiner's question about the election season, the Minister stated that things were hot even though the season had not entered full swing. Regarding electoral violence, he said he was most concerned about the Southeast, where the spirit of compromise is almost nonexistent and there is no strong traditional social hierarchy to control the parties. Batagarawa also expressed concern about parts of the Southwest and South-South (citing the Chevron facility seizure) as well as Plateau State in the Middle Belt. He added that he was much less concerned with the rest of the Middle Belt or the North. The Ambassador noted holding local government elections on August 10 was logistically impossible, and that November-December was a more realistic time-frame. The Ambassador also predicted that significant violence could be expected for the gubernatorial elections. The Minister concurred with both assessments. (Comment: Batagarawa was very concerned about electoral violence because he knows all too well

that the army will be summoned to stem outbreaks  
because the police have proven incapable. End Comment)

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Debt Relief Once Again  
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19. (U) The Minister asked about debt relief for Nigeria, noting its importance to the economy. A/S Kansteiner replied there was very little chance for debt relief now; its eventuality would depend on the GON reaching agreement with the IMF and sustaining economic reform.

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More Help With Police Reform  
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10. (C) The Minister requested increased USG assistance in building an effective police force. His concern was that police ineffectiveness to contain communal violence forced the military to intervene in domestic security issues, increasing the potential for the army to be accused of the excessive use of force. He observed the police system currently allowed officers with almost no training to rise to a high rank, and that there was no vetting. This meant "bad men" could enter the force with the expectation of reaching its senior levels. Police ineffectiveness was a systemic problem in need of a "MPRI"-style approach to establish a training base and schools. He thought the one full-time American slated to work in the police headquarters as an advisor would be inadequate.

11. (C) The Ambassador pointed out that the full time position was created solely to work on developing a police training curriculum, to replace the approximately sixty year old program currently being used. He highlighted the problems we had to overcome to start this program, citing police resistance to the USG advisor having an office in police headquarters and to the location of a national information database at the headquarters. Batagarawa surmised the police were afraid the USG would use the advisor and the database "to spy" on them. The Ambassador noted that establishing a viable curriculum to train the force was a critical first step to reforming the police.

12. (C) A/S Kansteiner mentioned the Department had earmarked an additional five million dollars for police reform for Nigeria and stressed this was an important indication of our commitment to help with Nigerian police reform, given our usual policy reluctance toward providing police reform assistance. He added that we anticipate the money being available in four or five months; down the road a new survey of the overall police system and an action plan for its improvement might be considered.

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Ronco Support  
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13. (U) The Ambassador raised the issue of assistance to the Ronco team working the clean-up of the Ikeja ammunition transfer depot explosion. The Minister had received Ronco's letter enumerating support requirements; he stated the requests would be met completely. He also accepted the Ambassador's invitation to visit the site, noting they could also visit the Oshodi resettlement center. (Note: The trip is now planned for August 2.)

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Sao Tome Patrol Boat  
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14. (C) A/S Kansteiner told Batagarawa that, while in Libreville, he was informed Sao Tome's lone patrol boat reportedly had been hijacked to Nigeria by "pirates." The Assistant Secretary asked the Minister about the existence of a defense cooperation agreement between Nigeria and Sao Tome and whether Nigerian troops were stationed there. The Minister was not aware of the stolen patrol boat. He added that it was unlikely Nigerian troops were already stationed in Sao

Tome because he thought the cooperation agreement had not been formally concluded. He qualified his statement, however, noting his knowledge may not be current but that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had the lead on this issue and could provide an accurate update.

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Comment  
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15. (S) The Minister of State for the Army is our closest and most effective interlocutor at the Ministry of Defense. He has become the main GON interlocutor on the Benue inquiry. Regarding Benue, we underscored the seriousness of a credible investigation and we believe Batagarawa fully understands our position. In addition to our pressing him on Benue, the Army Minister has two other very serious potential concerns that may fall into his and the army's lap -- security for elections and Bakassi. On these and numerous other issues, we believe Batagarawa has the ear of the President. They probably discussed how to broach the sensitive issue of Bakassi with us. Batagarawa knew A/S Kansteiner would meet President Obasanjo. Batagarawa's discussion on the Bakassi was likely a primer for the subsequent Obasanjo-Kansteiner meeting (Septel.) Obasanjo might have wanted an indication of our position before deciding whether to raise it with the Assistant Secretary.

SIPDIS  
JETER